

Bible Correspondence Course

04 - Why Believe the Bible?

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In this lesson:

1. Claim of Inspiration

2. Type of Inspiration

3. 3 Tests for Historical Documents

4. Evidences for Inspiration

Why Believe the Bible?

In the last lesson we looked at why the Bible came from God and how it authorizes today. In this lesson we will look at the evidence that the Bible really is communication from God.

Claim of Inspiration

If you browse books you will probably find lots and lots of books that tell you how to live your life. We could call these “creed” books because they try to guide your actions. But how many of those creed books also claim they are inspired? In other words, how many of those creed books claim that the author(s) were guided by the mind of God as they were written? The answer is that only a handful of books even claim to be a creed book **and** to be written with the guidance of God.

The claim of inspiration is important because it doesn’t make logical sense for us to claim that a book is communication from God when the book itself doesn’t even claim that. If we take any book that **doesn’t** claim to be from God and claim that it **really is** from God, then we will be claiming God communicated to man through everything from a cookbook to a children’s pop-up book. That is ridiculous!

We should only examine a book as a potential book from God that is a creed book and also claims to be inspired, or guided by Him. The Bible is one of these types of books.

The Bible does claim to be inspired of God. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for*

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The word “*inspiration*” here does not just mean “*inspired*” as in getting a good idea. Instead it comes from the Greek word that means “*God-breathed*.” The Bible claims that it is a product of the Divine breath. It claims that the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit



The Bible claims that all the words in it are from, or approved of, by God.

as they wrote, which made sure that all the information in it was accurate. Jesus told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them after He left and help them to remember everything He had said. “*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*” (John 14:26) Peter referred to the writers of Scripture as “*moved by the Holy Ghost.*” “*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the*

prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Type of Inspiration

The Bible’s inspiration is not “*thought*” inspiration which is the idea that the thoughts are inspired, but the words are not. It has “*verbal, plenary*” inspiration.

Verbal

This means that all the words are there because God permitted it by direction of the Holy Spirit.

We still see personal messages and styles of writing in the Bible because the people writing them were not robots. They

were able to express things in their own style or say what they were feeling. However, the Holy Spirit made sure that what they said and what they taught was accurate.

An example of Scripture that shows how important each word is in the Bible is written by Paul. ***“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”*** (**Galatians 3:16**) Paul makes an argument that literally hinges on whether or not a noun is plural or singular. He is talking about whether the word should be ***“seeds”*** (plural) or ***“seed”*** (singular). Each word can make a difference in meaning. The Holy Spirit guided the writers and made sure that each word is accurate and approved of by God.

Specific thoughts take specific words.

“For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words.” (**1 Corinthians 2:11-13**) Paul said the Holy Spirit used words to teach. We are not to treat the Bible as if it just contains some good thoughts but all the words are not to be treated as important. Specific thoughts take specific words. Just look at a legal contract and see how many specific words are used to make sure there is no misunderstanding later. We may word things differently when translating the Bible, or even paraphrase something in order to make an idea clear, but we are never to change the words to make the meaning different. Even whether a noun is plural or singular may affect the message from God. God obviously had a meaning in mind when He communicated to man. We must look for, and interpret, His correct meaning when using God’s word.

Plenary

The word “plenary” means “full,” and refers to the idea that all of the Scripture is inspired. If it is Scripture, then it is inspired. Notice again, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*” (2 Timothy 3:16)

3 Tests for Historical Documents

When we look at the Bible, or any historical document, we can apply three tests to it. These tests are to determine historical reliability. We are not looking at the evidences to show that the Bible really was guided by a Divine mind. We will look at that later under the topic **Evidences for Inspiration**. Right now, we are simply trying to see if the Bible recorded history accurately. Why is that important? If a book claims to be from God, surely it would get historical information accurate! If we can’t trust the writers of the Bible to record facts of history correctly, then why should we listen to them when they claim they were guided by God and have knowledge about our soul’s destiny and salvation?

Bibliographical Test

This is an examination of the textual transmission by which documents reach us. In other words, was the Bible accurately copied over the years so that the original message stayed true.

Number of Manuscripts

One item to view in the Bibliographical Test is to see how many manuscripts, or copies, of the work you have. The idea is that the more manuscripts you have, the more you can compare the copies and see if there were major changes over the years. The Old and New Testaments have more manuscripts for comparison than other works of antiquity. We can look at thousands of copies, or parts, from various time periods, and compare them to ensure the message has stayed the same. As we will see later, evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls show us that the Bible has been copied accurately over thousands of years.

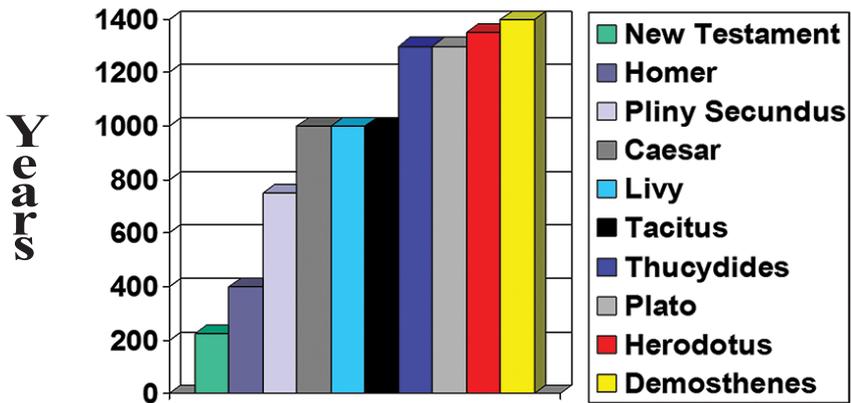


Codex Sinaiticus
4th Century
The oldest complete New Testament manuscript

Short Time Interval

This theory states that the closer your copies are in time to the original writing, the more likely they are to be accurate to the original. This idea proposes that there is probably less time for the message to get changed in a copy that was made shortly after the original. When we look at the New Testament, the time interval between the original writings and the earliest existing copy is very small compared to some other writings of antiquity. The time interval between the original writings of the New Testament in the 1st Century A.D. and the earliest, complete existing copy of the New Testament from about the 4th Century A.D., is a time interval of about 230 years. “This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet’s death.” (Kenyon, Frederic G. Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament. London: Macmillan and Company, 1901, p. 4.)

In short, the amount of manuscript evidence and the short time interval make the accuracy of our modern copies of the Bible more backed up by evidence than other works of antiquity.



Time interval comparison between the New Testament and other works of antiquity

You may have heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls which are scrolls of writing discovered in the 20th century. Some of the writing was dated to have been written before Christ came to Earth. One book that was found was the Book of Isaiah, from the Old Testament. “For example, even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.” (Archer, Gleason L., Jr. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, 1974, pp. 23-25.)



*The Great Isaiah Scroll
part of the Dead Sea Scrolls
{PD-1996|Israel|}*

When we pick up our book of Isaiah today and compare it to one that was written prior to the life of Christ, we find that the message

is identical! Those who claim the Bible has not been copied accurately down through the years, or claim that we do not have an accurate copy today, are ignoring the evidence!

Internal Evidence Test

Does the internal testimony of the document contradict itself? If so, then we can dismiss the writing as not guided by God.

The Bible has been accused of having contradictions but these have been shown to be false. One attack has been that the writers of the Gospel account (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) did not write their recording of the events in an identical way. For example, Matthew may write that the disciples of Jesus fell asleep while Jesus was praying before going to the cross. Luke adds some extra information by saying, “*And when he rose up from his prayer, he came unto the disciples, and found them sleeping for sorrow,*” (**Luke 22:45**) Luke records the extra information that the disciples “cried themselves to sleep.” Does that mean Luke’s account of the events contradict Matthew? Not at all. It is just two different people describing the same event. One will add a detail that the other one didn’t, but they don’t contradict.

Other writings that claim to be from God have contradictions. For example, the Qur’an attempts to give instructions about the inheritance for the family after the death of a man. But in so doing, it leaves an internal contradiction of a mathematical impossibility. If, for example, a man dies and leaves behind his mother, his wife, and two sisters, the Qur’an states that the mother “shall have the third,” his wife “shall have the fourth,” and “if there be two (sisters), they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves.” (Surah 4:11-12, 176) If this is the case, the man’s inheritance has to leave behind one-third, one-fourth, and two-thirds. In other words, the inheritance totals up to 125%! It is a mathematical impossibility to have someone’s possessions total more than 100%!

***The Qur’an allows for all of a man’s
possessions to equal 125%!
This type of math was not guided by God!***

External Evidence Test

We can also look at evidence outside the document to see if the document recorded history accurately. As for the Bible we may look at three different areas outside the Bible to see if it has recorded history accurately.

Early Believers

Writings of early believers verify what the Bible states. This shows us that the Bible we have today matches the Bible from earlier days. If someone quotes from the Bible in the 3rd or 4th century and it matches what I have today, I know the Bible has been transmitted accurately. Or, if a historian of the past records an event and it matches what the Bible says, that is further proof that the Bible is historically accurate.

Non-Christian Confirmation

Writings of non-Christians also verify what the Bible states. This is strong evidence because the writers have nothing to gain by verifying what the Bible states. These writings serve to verify that the Bible we have matches the Bible and teaching from earlier days. It also verifies that the Bible is accurate in its historical descriptions. One such verification comes from Lucian of Samosata. “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day-the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them;... and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.” (Lucian of Samosata. “Death of Pelegrine.” In *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, 4 vols. Trans. By H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949, pp. 11-13.)

Notice the historical things that Lucian verifies as true:

- The leader of the Christians was crucified
- Christians believe they are immortal
- Christians believe they are brothers after they are converted
- Christians worship the crucified teacher
- Christians live after the laws of the crucified teacher
- Christians despise worldly goods and share them

Even though Lucian was laughing at Christians, he left us great evidence to show that what the Bible records about the way Christians were in the first century was historically accurate.

Archaeology

Archaeology can do two things regarding the Bible:

1. *Illuminate* - adds additional information about something described in the Bible or the time the Bible history occurs
2. *Confirm* - verify the accuracy of the Bible

To date, archaeology has given us more information about the way people lived in different times of Bible history, and has verified that the Bible's recording of history is accurate. If the Bible was just written by man, without the guidance of a divine mind, we should find historical inaccuracies and contradictions. But we don't! "In fact, while thousands of finds from the ancient world support in broad outline and often in detail the biblical picture, not one incontrovertible find has ever contradicted the Bible." (Geisler, Norman L. Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, p. 52.) In other words, when we find something in archaeology and we know what it is, it supports the Bible's historical accuracy!

Other Books

Other books that claim to be from God are not necessarily historically accurate. Again, if a book cannot even record history accurately, why should we believe it was written with the guidance of the mind of God, and why listen to it regarding our salvation?

The Old Testament records that Moses led the Israelites to a place near the promised land of Canaan. Moses died and then the Israelites crossed the Jordan river and went into Canaan.

Years after being in Canaan, the Israelites wanted a king because they wanted to be like other nations. God allowed them to have a king. But, **the Qur'an** has Moses talking about the kings that Israel had as if it had already happened. "And when Musa said to his people: O my people! Remember the favor of Allah upon you when He raised prophets among you and **made you kings** and gave you what He had not given to any other among the nations." (Surah 5:20) How could Moses talk to the Israelites about the kings that God had given them, when God did not give them a king until years after Moses died?

The Book of Mormon, which was first published in 1830, records information about the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. "But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying - Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of the heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. And behold, **he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem** which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God." (Alma 7:9-10) Jesus was not born in Jerusalem, as the Book of Mormon states, but instead was born in Bethlehem. "*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise-men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,*" (**Matthew 2:1**) There was even prophecy in the Old Testament that the Christ, the Messiah, would come from Bethlehem. "*But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.*" (**Micah 5:2**) The Book of Mormon is not historically accurate. It is unlikely that a loving, human parent would forget where their own son was born. But, the Book of Mormon gets this information incorrect. If God was really guiding the writing of the Book of Mormon, you would think that He would get the location of the birth of His own Son correct! If we can't trust the Book of Mormon to get history right, then why would we believe it is communication from God?

Evidences for Inspiration

It's fine that the Bible is an accurate book, historically speaking. But what if the historian writers were just really, really good and they recorded history accurately? What further evidence is there to show that the writing of the Bible was guided by God?

Internal Evidences for Inspiration

Unity of Theme and Plan

Even though the Bible is a collection of books written over a time period of hundreds of years, and written by people from various walks of life, it maintains a unity of theme and plan. For writings by so many different people over a long span of time to harmonize so well, suggests there was really one mind and one plan behind the scenes and guiding the writing.

In describing the unity of the theme and plan of the Bible, perhaps Wayne Jackson summarized it the best. "The Book of Genesis tells of man's fall into a sinful state. In Exodus through Deuteronomy, by the giving of the law, sin is defined and vividly characterized. The Historical Books of the OT portray man's inability to justify himself on the basis of law-keeping, hence, they underscore the need for a Justifier. The Prophets herald the coming of that illustrious Justifier. After four silent centuries, the Gospel Writers inform us that Christ has come, bringing justification. The Book of Acts demonstrates how first-century men and women appropriated Jehovah's justifying grace unto themselves through loving obedience. The various Epistles to churches and individuals instructed saints how to grow toward spiritual maturity, and finally, the Revelation pictures the ultimate and complete triumph of our great God over all his enemies." (Jackson, Wayne. *Fortify Your Faith*. Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1974, pp. 58-59.)

Unity of Doctrine

The Bible has harmonious agreement when it describes doctrines. The laws may change based on the different dispensation under which humans live. But, the laws and doctrines

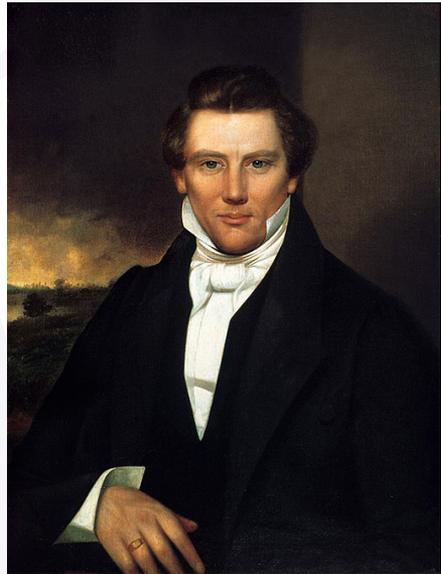
in one dispensation do not contradict the laws and doctrines in the same dispensation.

As we saw before in the lesson about attributes of God, God is immutable. He does not change. When God teaches us who He is in a book of the Old Testament, it does not contradict who He teaches us He is in the New Testament. It doesn't matter if it was written by a different person in a different time, all the writings were guided by the Holy Spirit and harmonize.

Prophecy

The Bible gives its own description and instruction regarding a prophet that is not from God. ***“When a prophet speaketh in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.”*** (**Deuteronomy 18:22**) By its own definition, the Bible says that if someone makes a prophecy and it does not come to pass, then they are a false prophet. Therefore, if the Bible makes a prophecy and it does not come to pass, the Bible is false. So, when it comes to prophecy, how does the Bible fare? “No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfulfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time (Dan. 9), city (Mic. 5:2), and nature (Is. 7:14) of Christ’s birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection (see Is. 53) Numerous other prophecies have been fulfilled, including the destruction of Edom (Obad. 1), the curse on Babylon (Is. 13), the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 26) and Nineveh (Nah. 1-3), and the return of Israel to the Land (Is. 11:11). Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the [Hindu] Veda. But none of those books contains predictive prophecy. As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible.” (Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986. p. 196) Only by being guided by the mind of God could prophets make predictions hundreds of years in advance, and have them all come true!

The Mormon founder, Joseph Smith, made some prophecies as recorded in one of the Mormon books known as “Doctrine & Covenants.” One prophecy was that the American Civil War would spread to all nations. “Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls; And the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at this place. For behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and then war shall be poured out upon all nations.” (Doctrine & Covenants 87:1-3) Remember what the Bible said, *“when a prophet speaketh in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken: the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.”* (Deuteronomy 18:22) We should not be afraid of Joseph Smith. Even though he claimed “thus saith the Lord,” the things which he spoke did not come to pass, and therefore, they are not what Jehovah had spoken. By the Bible’s definition, Joseph Smith was a false prophet!



Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, falsely predicted the American Civil War would spread to all nations.

Scientific Accuracy and Foreknowledge

The Bible contains accurate scientific information that science would “discover” years later. How did the writers know about these things without the Divine mind sharing the information?



*Bloodletting in 1860
The Burns Archive
- Burns Archive via
Newsweek, 2.4.2011*

The Bible says, “*For the life of the flesh is in the blood;*” (**Leviticus 17:11**). Yet, up to the 1800s, people still practiced bloodletting. They may have injured or killed people by draining their blood. If only they had checked with the Bible first.

The Israelites were told by God to cover up their bodily waste. “*Thou shalt have a place also without the camp, whither thou shalt go forth abroad: and thou shalt have a paddle among thy weapons; and it shall be, when thou sittest down abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee:*” (**Deuteronomy 23:12-13**) We know now this

is sanitary. But, centuries after God spoke, people dumped their waste in the streets and spread disease. If only they had checked with the Bible first.

Conclusion

We can trust that the Bible is from God! It claims inspiration, it is historically accurate, and it has evidences to show that a Divine mind was involved. We can also trust that it has been accurately copied over time. As Frederic Kenyon wrote, “The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.” (Kenyon, Frederic. *Our Bible and Ancient Manuscripts*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939, p. 23.)

The Bible is From God

- It claims to be inspired
- It passes the 3 tests for historical reliability
 - Bibliographical
 - Internal Evidences
 - External Evidences
- It has evidences for guidance from God
 - Unity
 - Prophecy
 - Scientific Accuracy and Foreknowledge

TFTW BCC-04 Review Questions

(Circle the letter of the correct answer)

- 1. If the Bible did not claim to be inspired we should:**
 - a. not claim that it is inspired
 - b. not believe that it is inspired
 - c. not treat it as if it was from God
 - d. all of the above
- 2. The Bible claims what type of inspiration?**
 - a. Verbal, plenary
 - b. Thought
 - c. Neo-orthodox
- 3. Strong evidence the Bible has been copied accurately for centuries is found in:**
 - a. men's commentaries on the Bible
 - b. The Dead Sea Scrolls
- 4. The internal evidence test looks for:**
 - a. contradictions or factual inaccuracies in the text
 - b. the consistency of the literary style
- 5. If the Bible does not record history accurately, then we would conclude:**
 - a. it is for spiritual purposes, not a history book
 - b. it is not inspired of God
 - c. it is partially accurate, but still reliable for our salvation
- 6. How many incontrovertible archaeological finds have contradicted the Bible?**
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3

- 7. The Bible has an amazing unity of:**
- a. theme
 - b. plan
 - c. doctrine
 - d. all of the above
- 8. How many unconditional Bible prophecies have been fulfilled?**
- a. 0
 - b. 3
 - c. dozens
- 9. One example of Bible scientific foreknowledge is:**
- a. we need blood to have life
 - b. the chemical makeup of the Sun
- 10. How did Bible writers over time still harmonize?**
- a. They copied others' work, writing nothing original
 - b. One divine mind guided them all

After circling all the letters for your answers, fill out the information below. Then tear out this page and mail it to your teacher for correction and credit toward your certificate.

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